

**DC FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL**

Informational Bulletin #2009-1

Updated November 2009

Dennis L. Rubin, Fire Chief

Bruce D. Faust, Fire Marshal



Decorative Vegetation Inside Buildings

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The District of Columbia Fire Prevention Code, and the International Fire Code, Section 806, regulates the use and display of both natural and artificial vegetation inside buildings. The majority of Section 806 deals specifically with natural cut trees, such as Christmas trees, and artificial vegetation. Natural cut trees located inside a building can pose a serious fire hazard when not safely displayed or when not properly prepared or cared for. Artificial trees and vegetation that are not flame-resistant or flame-retardant can also pose a fire hazard to the occupants of the building.

MEANS OF EGRESS

Where permitted, both natural and artificial decorative vegetation, including trees, shall not be located in any exit or exit enclosure, such as corridors or exit stairways, and shall not be placed to obstruct exit doors and accesses to exit doors or obstruct the visibility of exit signs and exit doors.

CANDLES AND OPEN FLAME

Candles and open flames shall not be used on or near decorative vegetation. Where their use is permitted, candles shall be prohibited in areas where occupants stand or in an aisle or exit.

ELECTRICAL WIRING AND LIGHTING

The use of unlisted electrical wiring and lighting on decorative vegetation shall be prohibited. Listed electrical lighting typically bears the mark of an approved testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL), and shall only be used with listed power taps or power strips that are grounded and equipped with over-current protection (circuit breaker). Power taps and power strips shall only be plugged directly into an approved permanently installed receptacle. The use of electrical wiring and lighting on metal artificial trees shall be prohibited.

ARTIFICIAL TREES AND VEGETATION

Artificial decorative vegetation shall be flame-resistant or flame-retardant and shall be documented and certified by the manufacturer as such in an approved manner.

RESPONSIBILITY/BUILDING OWNER

In accordance with Section 110.2 of the Fire Prevention Code, the owner is responsible for the safe and proper maintenance of any structure or premises. In all structures the fire protection equipment, means of egress, alarms, devices and safeguards shall be maintained in a safe and proper operating condition.

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Building Occupant

In accordance with Section 110.3 of the Fire Prevention Code, when a building occupant creates conditions in violation of the code by virtue of storage and use of substances, materials, devices, and appliances, such occupant shall be held responsible for the abatement of said hazardous conditions.

NATURAL CUT TREES

Natural Cut Trees – Restricted Occupancies:

Natural cut trees shall be prohibited inside Group I and Group R-4 occupancies. These occupancies include: Residential Board & Care Facilities, Assisted Living Facilities, Half-way Houses, Group Homes, Shelter Houses, Convalescent Facilities, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Mental Health & Detoxification Facilities, Jails, Detention Centers, Prerelease Centers, Child Care Facilities, and Day Care Facilities. Additionally natural cut trees shall be prohibited in areas not protected with an approved automatic sprinkler system located within groups; R-1, R-2, Group A assembly (except for places of worship), educational and mercantile occupancies. Group R-1 and R-2 occupancies include: hotels, motels, boarding houses, apartment buildings, apartment buildings and dormitories.

Exception: Trees shall be allowed within dwelling units in Group R-2 occupancies. (Apartment Buildings)

INSTALLATION AND CARE OF NATURAL TREES

Tree Preparation:

Natural cut trees shall have the trunk bottoms cut off at least one-half inch (0.5") (12.7mm) above the original cut prior to placement into an approved tree stand or support device.

Support Device Stability:

An approved tree stand or support device shall be capable of holding the tree securely in an upright position so the tree will not tip over.

Support Device Water Capacity:

An approved tree stand or support device shall be capable of containing a minimum 2-day water supply. The water level, when full, shall cover the tree stem at least two inches (2.0") (51mm).

Proximity to Heat Sources:

Natural cut trees shall be located away from heat vents and any open flame or heat-producing devices a minimum distance equal to the height of the tree.

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Daily Inspection and Care

The water level shall be maintained above the fresh cut at all times and checked at least once daily. Additionally, the tree shall be checked daily for dryness. Positive indicators of dryness are when the needles or leaves fall off readily when a tree branch is shaken or if the needles are brittle and break when bent between the thumb and index finger.

Conditions Requiring Removal of Natural Cut Trees Dryness

Trees showing signs of dryness shall be removed from the building immediately.

Improper Support

Trees found to be unstable shall be reinstalled as if the tree was being set-up for the first time, including a new fresh cut of the trunk bottom, or the tree shall be removed from the building immediately.

Inadequate Water Level

When a tree is found to have a water level below the fresh cut, the tree shall be removed from the building immediately.

Obstruction of Means of Egress

When a tree is located in any portion of the means of egress, the tree shall be removed from the means of egress to a safe and appropriate location or removed from the building immediately.

Inside a Restricted Occupancy

When a tree is found in an occupancy, or portion thereof, where prohibited by the DC Fire Code, the tree shall be removed from the building immediately.